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Question1: In today's world, it is critical that we maintain a viable economy for small and medium-sized farmers and producers; mass production encourages and necessitates resource exploitation and unhealthy agricultural processes (think pesticide loading and feed-lots). Modern agriculture continues to slide towards a somewhat monopolistic situation (albeit a natural monopoly caused by economies of scale). It is crucial that regulations seek to benefit smaller, more controlled and eco/human friendly farmers. This may require shifting subsidies from mass production of soy, corn and such products to supporting farmers trying to grow organically. And as land demand shifts from agriculture to property desires, it is ever-more important to provide more support for farmers trying to hold on to, or buy new land.

Perhaps farm policy should encourage more small scale farming and provide the necessary financial support needed for farmers to convert to and sell organically. Perhaps a new "Sustainable" label may be designed to allow for more farmers to produce and for more consumers to buy sustainable product, creating an entirely new market and encouraging production within the United States. And although international trade is a wonderful thing (as I always say, I like my bananas!), the farm policy and trade policies need to stop subsidizing imports (creating artificial prices) and encourage consumers to buy locally, perhaps even try to create local food networks.

Question2: I believe that the greatest asset the United States possesses in trade is our capacity for innovation and our position to be world leaders. This means that we have great potential in the world's trade market, but that we must act on this potential rather than trying to maintain status quo. With the changes and concerns facing society, the United States can best maximize its ability to compete in the world market through being the world leader in designing a sustainable agriculture system, founded on human and ecologically friendly production techniques. It is obvious that the U.S cannot produce our agricultural products at a competitive price compared to other countries with low-wage labor and less expensive land, but we can devise new and more sustainable ways to produce better, higher quality products. The trend has begun; I have seen it throughout the U.S and other countries: consumers are beginning to realize that the quality of their food and other products is more important than mass quantity. The U.S, if it wants to remain a viable competitor in the world agriculture market, has to maximize on its capacity to make this conversion, to be a leader in today's market place, and to head the global movement into a sustainable future.

Question3: I wish that I knew more about the actual workings and politics behind U.S agricultural policy today, and as I feel that my knowledge is somewhat limited, I cannot propose any specific policy changes. What I do know is that there are certain goals that must back farm policy. More than anything, Americans take their food for granted

and have become accustomed to not "paying" for what we eat (and then we spend our saved money on consumer products that we probably don't need...). The artificial prices of food (as well as gas) lead to overconsumption and waste by consumers, and hurt producers in the long run. Farmers are being encouraged to grow mass-product "staple" crops, which are then being over produced and turned into unhealthy foods (e.g. corn syrup and other processed foods). If incentives want to be effective, both in encouraging healthy and productive farming as well as healthy consumption (perhaps eventually aiding in fighting the obesity craze), benefits have to be offered to producers who farm healthier food in sustainable ways. Perhaps the incentive program may be molded to encourage movement to medium-sized farms that use "sustainable" methods (hence, the idea of a "sustainable" label for ag products).

Question4: I rally behind the idea of a "Sustainable" label, a certification that requires certain production techniques by producers and tells consumers that what they are buying is produced in a way that is eco and human friendly. The organic label is a wonderful thing, and has done much to help in responsible consuming, but a new label may allow for a broader production in less environmentally detrimental ways. I wish that I could go into specifics about what "sustainable" entails, but I am sure that can be figured out somewhat readily. To make this a viable solution, the farm policy must provide financial support to converting farmers and aide to those who are willing to move to smaller, more sustainable production.

Question5: Continuing to offer crop insurance and protection programs for rural areas is a necessity. Rural areas need continued support for education (as schools tend to suffer without huge populations to draw from) and incentives for students from rural areas to continue on to higher education definitely are needed. As rural areas tend to be "dump sites" and are often underneath the federal regulation radar, it is crucial that programs to ensure environmental protection exist to attend to areas with low populations. These things are important for farming and non-agricultural rural areas. The creation and support of community action groups also helps to promote healthy rural growth and development.

Question6: The things mentioned in the question are of necessity! The next farm bill needs to be a product of a desire to support healthy, environmentally friendly and sustainable agriculture. This means supporting the production and marketing of organic/sustainable produce and food, monitoring the meat industry and preventing unsanitary and unnatural (not to mention inhumane) treatment of animals, and encouraging technologies that are renewable and sustainable. The focus of the new farm bill needs to be on creating a new (or redesigning the old) system to be sustainable, environmentally and ecologically concerned, as well as conducive of human quality of life.